

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Social, Personal and Health Education
REPORT**

**Castleknock Community College
Carpenterstown Rd, Dublin 15
Roll number: 76062B**

Date of inspection: 29 April 2009

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**REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND
HEALTH EDUCATION (SPHE)**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock Community College, Dublin 15. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over three days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the deputy principal and members of the SPHE team. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The social, personal and health education of students is a key component of the holistic education offered in Castleknock Community College. The pastoral care programme provided which includes SPHE and senior cycle lifeskills, is central to the life of the college and impacts positively on the school's stated aim of creating a caring and supportive school environment. There is a high level of commitment and interest in the programme throughout the school.

SPHE enjoys very good provision. All junior cycle students are timetabled for one class of SPHE per week in accordance with circular letter M11/03. The inclusion of personal development themes in Transition Year (TY) and Lifeskills in the fifth and sixth year is commended as further supports for senior cycle students. To enhance this very good practice, access to SPHE for some students who receive additional learning support should be reviewed. It was noted, that in the case of one SPHE lesson, a small number of students were routinely withdrawn for learning support. This practice, which is not in line with general school procedures, should be reviewed. If students in receipt of additional support are withdrawn from SPHE each week they do not have access to a subject which is a compulsory component of the junior cycle programme.

To enhance curricular provision a significant number of co-curricular activities form part of school life throughout the academic year. Activities such as Grandparents Day, Friendships Days, student leadership opportunities and the annual Intercultural Festival effectively support the pastoral care and personal development of students in the college. The work of all those involved in organising and participating in such activities is highly commended.

A whole-school approach is evident in providing a good quality SPHE programme. Senior management is very supportive of the programme and has played a significant role in leading and managing pastoral care in the school. The school chaplain, guidance counsellors, year heads and form tutors all play an integral role in supporting the programme. In most cases form tutors are assigned to teach SPHE or Lifeskills to their class. Tutors also meet their class for a weekly tutor period, and normally are assigned to teach them a second subject. This very good practice helps to establish a rapport with the group which in turn generates a secure learning environment. This is very important for effective learning in SPHE.

As SPHE or Lifeskills is timetabled in junior and senior cycle, nineteen teachers comprise the SPHE team. In recognising the challenges associated with co-ordinating such a large team, senior management has established a core SPHE planning team comprising one of the deputy principals, a year head and a special duties teacher. This team, which oversees the organisation and planning of the programme, demonstrates a very high level of commitment to and enthusiasm for the subject. At present no current teacher of SPHE or Lifeskills sits on the core planning team. To further develop a cohesive approach to the personal and social development of students and support programme evaluation, it is recommended that members of the teaching team should be included on the core team, possibly a link person for both the junior and senior cycle, or alternatively, an existing member of the core team should be deployed to teach the programme.

Senior management considers continuous professional development (CPD) to be essential in supporting high quality provision of SPHE and Lifeskills. The school is an active member of the Irish Association for Pastoral Care in Education (IAPCE). There has been a good level of engagement with CPD both at whole-school and subject department level and a systematic approach is evident in the procedures for up-skilling the SPHE teachers. This is very good practice. It was noted positively that SPHE teachers have attended a broad range of courses on topics relevant to SPHE and that regular contact is maintained with the relevant support services. This has ensured that there is a commendable level of shared expertise among the teaching team. In planning CPD for next year, it is recommended that training be prioritised for members of the team who have yet to receive the introductory and RSE training. In recognising the significant challenges in upskilling such a large team of SPHE teachers, the possibility of establishing a smaller core teaching team could be considered by management. It was noted positively from a review of the minutes from planning meetings that the possibility of utilising the talents and expertise of current staff members for internal CPD has been discussed. This is a worthwhile initiative. To facilitate the further sharing of information, it is suggested that a copy of the information supplied at each in-service course attended be filed in a separate CPD folder. This would ensure that the information is available to each member of the team to be referred to when required.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A number of whole-school policies are in place to support student care. A commendable level of consultation informs policy development in the school. It is particularly laudable that policies in areas such as anti-bullying and substance use highlight the contribution that the SPHE programme makes to educating students on these issues. This should facilitate a cohesive approach being adopted at whole-school and classroom level and prove useful in reviewing the effectiveness of the implementation of policy and SPHE planning. The SPHE policy is at draft stage. Prior to ratification it is recommended that the practices adopted by the school to deal with possible disclosures of a sensitive nature be also documented to link with the school's child protection policy.

The RSE policy which is ratified since 2004 is due for review. It is recommended that the policy be amended to incorporate the very good practices evident in the school and to ensure that the revised document includes all the information in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Science available at www.education.ie.

Very good procedures to facilitate subject department planning have been put in place by senior management. The core planning team meets on a very regular basis. In addition planning meetings between the core planning team and the full team of teachers of SPHE and lifeskills are held as part of the yearly calendar of subject department meetings. To inform on-going programme review, teachers from each year group meet periodically with the planning team. This is very good practice as the teachers currently teaching the programme are best placed to inform any review and subsequent planning of the programme. A review of minutes indicates that a collaborative approach is taken to planning. The manner in which the work of all staff members is acknowledged is particularly laudable.

Formal subject planning for the SPHE and Lifeskills programme is well established and common programme plans are at an advanced stage of development. Each common programme comprises a set of lesson plans and accompanying resource materials. These are filed systematically in folders which are colour-coded for each module. A good range of resource materials are included for each area. From reviewing the junior cycle programme it was noted that some of the ten modules comprising the SPHE curriculum framework are not included. Therefore, it is recommended that the junior cycle programme be reviewed to incorporate all of the modules. The learning outcomes from first year through to third year should be reviewed to enhance the systematic progression of students' knowledge and skills. This review will enhance the breadth and coherence of the programme and facilitate the incremental approach to the development of students' understanding and skills as recommended in the curriculum framework. Written programme documentation should also be mindful of incorporating the whole-school and cross-curricular activities that support the SPHE programme.

Very good practice is evident in planning for a RSE programme that meets the needs of all students in the school. Productive links have been established with outside agencies that have provided advice on planning a programme to support students who have particular additional educational needs. This is very good practice. From reviewing the RSE programme it is evident that there is some scope to further enhance the breadth of the programme provided at senior cycle. Since staff members are attending senior cycle RSE training, this is an opportune time to review the breadth and balance of the senior cycle RSE programme and make the necessary adjustments.

The team approach to facilitating the senior cycle lifeskills programme is commendable. The draft senior cycle SPHE curriculum framework would prove a useful resource in extending the breadth of the learning outcomes for each module and in devising outcomes that demonstrate clear incremental progression from the junior cycle programme. Over time the format used to set out the junior cycle modules could be used as a template in drafting the lifeskills programme plan.

A very good range of resources are centrally stored to support programme delivery. It is commendable that the resources are currently being catalogued to facilitate ease of access among teachers. Consideration should be given to organising the catalogue in terms of the ten SPHE modules and the age appropriateness of the materials. This would make it easier to identify gaps and plan, over time, for enhancing the range of materials available.

Individual teachers engage in very good quality planning for SPHE lessons. Teachers routinely complete review-form templates. Observation of a selection of these forms indicated some very good evaluative statements on the common lesson plans. This information will prove very useful in informing a review of the common programmes of work. All the review forms are returned to the core planning team who monitor the main findings. However, the procedures for returning this data merit review to reduce the workload attached to analysing the information. To maximise the potential of the review process, it is recommended that, when teachers are completing the review forms, particular focus is placed on assessing the suitability of lesson objectives, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies deployed and the resources centrally chosen for each lesson. This will assist the planning team in refining the incremental approach to the development of student knowledge, skills and attitudes. When evaluating the resources used, particular attention should focus on the extent to which the range of resources used accommodates the varying student learning styles and mixed-ability settings.

There was evidence of very good advance planning and preparation for the lessons observed. In a number of cases it was evident that teachers made amendments to the lesson sequence as outlined in the common plan or collated additional resource material. This proved very beneficial in supporting student learning. This work should also inform on-going review of common plans. In one lesson observed, strategies that assessed students' learning were planned as an integral component of the lesson plan. It is recommended that this very good practice be extended to all lessons. These assessment strategies should be clearly linked to key learning outcomes for the lesson.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

All lessons had a clear focus and were generally well structured. There was some very good practice evident in the sharing of lesson outcomes with students in terms of what they would be learning in the lesson and why. This strategy should form part of all lessons to support lesson structure. When learning outcomes are then referred to throughout the lesson this consolidates learning and facilitates opportunities for student reflection and self-evaluation. This is a key principle underpinning the aims of the SPHE curriculum framework. At times there was scope to adjust the pace and pitch of the learning outcomes for the lesson to a level more appropriate to students' experiences and stage in the programme. This should be addressed in the context of the programme reviews recommended in the previous section.

Some very good practice was evident in the preparation of resource materials to support student learning. Best practice was evident in lessons where the resource material was adjusted to strengthen links with the intended learning outcomes or when the range of resources used suited the different learner styles typical of mixed-ability settings. For instance the inclusion of visual images on work sheets supported students' learning by enabling them to move from concrete to more abstract and generalised thinking. In another lesson on nutrition the use of a 3-dimensional model of the food pyramid facilitated learners to actively engage with exemplars from each of the food groups. Teacher observation of students as they completed these exercises provided valuable opportunities to assess progress and achievement.

There was some very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the development of support materials to optimise learning. One particularly effective use of ICT occurred in a lesson on personal safety where a video clip was shown to students using a laptop and data projector. The accompanying strategies used by the teacher to facilitate whole-class discussion and draw out relevant points from the chosen video engaged students effectively in a deeper discussion of the topic. As such ICT resources are used by teachers they should be added to the catalogue of resources being compiled.

A range of methodologies was deployed in the lessons observed. Of particular note were instances where students actively engaged in experiential learning. Ice-breaker activities such as walking debates and braining storming exercises were used to very good effect to establish students' understanding of the concepts under discussion and to allow the class teacher to gauge students' previous knowledge and experience of the topic. In all lessons observed, deliberate efforts were made to link lesson content to prior learning or student experiences which greatly assisted understanding. In some instances, to support continuity further, the very good practice of informing students of the

subject matter for forthcoming lessons was noted. This is a particularly effective strategy in a SPHE context where lessons are delivered in one period per week.

In a number of lessons observed, whole-class discussion, group work or circle time were used to good effect to facilitate understanding and actively promote positive attitudes. Very good efforts were made to ensure that students understood the task in hand. During the discussion phases of lessons effective questioning encouraged students to express their opinions and make sound judgments on issues relating to the topic. Very good practice was evident in instances where the development of students' higher-order skills was facilitated by using gentle probing questions that encouraged students to analyse critically the information under discussion. Plenary sessions were most effective in instances where student feedback was summarised on the classroom board and recorded in student folders. To build on the good practice when planning these activities, the balance of student-led and teacher-led activity needs careful monitoring to make certain that the teacher acts mainly as the facilitator to enable students to process and clarify the information for themselves. In adopting such a strategy opportunities are also provided for teachers to monitor student work and provide feedback.

Classroom management was generally very good. Best practice was evident where the ground rules for SPHE lessons were consistently enforced. All lessons took place in an atmosphere of care where the privacy of each student was respected and where issues were dealt with in a sensitive and reassuring manner. Best practice in the management of group work occurred where the task assigned was timebound and where roles were assigned to group members. In some of the teacher-based rooms visited it was noted positively that SPHE corners have been developed to enable students to display some of their own work. This good practice promotes a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for the creation of a stimulating learning environment.

Students make good progress in SPHE. From a sample of work reviewed in student folders it is evident they undertake a good range of tasks in lessons. In the lessons observed very good attention was paid to the development of students' literacy skills by clearly explaining the key terminology associated with the topic under discussion. To optimise students' learning, the SPHE department should link with the home economics and science departments to standardise the terminology used in the teaching of the topics common to all three areas. To enhance the very good practices already evident and to maximise student learning, it is recommended that a summary stage be incorporated into all lessons. This would enable students to assess their learning and also provide opportunities for teachers to reinforce key points of information and provide feedback to students on their progress in the lesson.

ASSESSMENT

There was some good use of strategies to assess students' progress in the lessons observed. Questioning strategies and worksheet activities, as well as the monitoring of group activities, provided opportunities to assess students' learning. It was noted positively that students were assigned a home task in some of the lessons observed. This very good practice is further encouraged. Assigning the occasional home task reinforces learning and provides opportunities for students to reflect on the work covered. A review of student work indicates that there is scope for the SPHE team to extend the assessment strategies used. This should include the provision of written feedback to individual students by monitoring key pieces of work, while at the same time respecting the students' right to privacy. For instance some group-project work was noted in a senior cycle lifeskills lesson. Success criteria could be devised for this project and included in planning documentation. These criteria could form the basis of the subsequent student feedback provided. Therefore, it is recommended that the team agrees an assessment policy for SPHE that includes strategies to provide feedback to individual students. It is important that the assessment modes used are fully compatible with the aims and objectives of the SPHE curriculum framework. Information and support on assessment is available in the *Guidelines for Teachers* that is published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

It is commendable that students complete end-of-module review forms. However, some of this information does not currently feed into overall programme review. To enhance collaborative practices, it is recommended that key points of information from all student review forms be collated

for each year group and discussed at the planning meetings between the core planning team and year group teachers.

In line with the ethos of the school, commendable efforts are made to establish links with parents to inform planning for the SPHE programme. Parents are informed about the programme at information evenings and are invited to view the materials. Letters are also issued regarding the RSE programme. This is very good practice. It is highly commendable that the school, in association with the Parents' Association, hosts a number of seminars for parents to complement the SPHE programme. As part of the school's on-going commitment to delivering a programme to meet students' needs, feedback on the programme is sought through the Parents' Association. This practice is highly commended.

Teachers maintain very good records of students' attendance and the work covered in SPHE lessons. It is commendable that the school reports to parents on students' progress in SPHE at parent-teacher meetings. In addition, student achievement in SPHE is recognised through the awarding of certificates that are signed by both teachers and parents on completion of programme modules. In the context of developing an assessment policy for SPHE, the team could consider the use of school reports as an additional means of providing feedback to parents and students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Providing for the social, personal and health education of students is a key component of the holistic education programme offered in Castleknock Community College.
- SPHE including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) enjoys very good provision.
- Senior management is very supportive of the programme and has played a significant role in leading and managing pastoral care in the school.
- Good practice is evident in the deployment of teachers to SPHE and Lifeskills.
- The school, in association with the Parents' Association, hosts a number of seminars for parents as part of the SPHE programme.
- A number of whole-school policies are in place to support student care and a commendable level of consultation informs policy development.
- Very good procedures to facilitate subject department planning have been established by senior management.
- There was evidence of very good advance planning and preparation for the lessons observed.
- There was some very good use of ICT in the development of support materials to optimise learning.
- A range of active methodologies that supported the experiential learning cycle underpinning the SPHE curriculum framework were deployed effectively in the lessons observed.
- Effective questioning encouraged students to express their opinions and make sound judgments on issues relating to the lesson topic.
- Commendable efforts are made to establish links with parents to inform planning for the SPHE programme.
- Teachers maintain very good records of students' attendance and the work covered in SPHE lessons.
- Student achievement in SPHE is recognised through the awarding of certificates that are signed by both teachers and parents on completion of programme modules.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- Members of the SPHE teaching team should be included on the core planning team or alternatively, an existing member of the core team should be deployed to teach SPHE or Lifeskills.

- The junior cycle programme plan should be reviewed to enhance the breadth and coherence of the programme to facilitate an incremental approach to the development of students' understanding and skills from first year through to third year.
- Individual teacher review of lessons should focus on the suitability of lessons outcomes, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies as well as the appropriateness of the resources centrally chosen for each lesson.
- An assessment policy should be agreed for SPHE that includes strategies to provide feedback to individual students. Strategies which assess students' progress and are linked to key learning outcomes should also be planned as an integral component of all SPHE lessons.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the members of the SPHE team and with the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The staff welcome the report's positive findings of the recognition given to the College's commitment to SPHE/RSE. We also wish to acknowledge the professional approach of the visiting inspector who ensured that the inspection was conducted in a very positive manner.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The College will act on the recommendations outlined in the report to further enhance the provision of SPHE/RSE in the College.